

January 14, 2004

Linda Lake, Chair and Members
Washington State Board of Health
1102 SE Quince St.
Olympia, WA 98504

Dear Chair Lake and Board Members,

I write to thank you for the career capping opportunity you gave me four and one half years ago to serve as Executive Director of the Washington State Board of Health, and to share with you my decision to step down, effective February 27, 2004. The honor I have had serving you will complete my thirty-year career in full time government service. I look forward not to retirement, but to assuming a different mix of professional and personal responsibilities --- a mix that will involve more time with my young family, more time with my aging, lonely sailboat, more time volunteering as President of the Washington State Public Association, part time work with the Washington Health Foundation and perhaps in other pursuits. As you know me, you know the chance to create another new role, this time that of Policy Coordinator for Washington Health Foundation, will likely lead the list of my interests.

I can think of no stronger group to lead efforts to re-establish the Board than the one Governor Locke put in place by appointing each of you. I can think of no greater privilege and no greater opportunity than the one you gave me to support your efforts. Thank you for your trust and support. As each of you knows, there are several lifetimes of public health wisdom and experience among you. Learning from that experience and listening to that wisdom has made my job a true pleasure, whether working on matters as simple as reminding us all to wash our hands, as arcane as measures of drinking water contamination, or as complex as unraveling the social injustices that threaten public health through prejudice based on social class, sexual orientation or national origin.

I am especially grateful to the Board Chairs I have worked with, Dennis Braddock and Linda Lake. With styles as different as day and night, and significantly different views on many public health issues, both were a pleasure. Both engaged us all in building toward a great and positive vision for the Board. And both used their considerable skill to lead our efforts toward it. I want also to thank Secretary Mary Selecky, Patty Hayes, Michelle Davis and dozens of other DOH staff who learned with us what a constructive relationship between DOH and the Board might be. They all worked hard to help everyone move in that direction.

I am confident that your continued leadership will be well supported by the Board staff we have assembled --- a group I am pleased and proud to have worked with and that I will miss. Plans are already underway for a smooth transition that will keep the Board's work moving forward on schedule. But I know too that this may become a moment for reflection and change. During the next few weeks of transition and beyond, I am more than willing to discuss with any or all of you my personal observations about where we have been together and where you might go from here.

As you look forward, I hope you will continue several values and traditions you started during these past four and one half years.

In a world filled these days with short-term, financial, political and administrative considerations and with ever more urgent, but ever changing "science", I hope you will continue to take the long view. I hope you will continue to distinguish yourselves by holding up questions like these for long examination, careful answer and on-going attention: Where should we be on health disparities in ten or fifteen years? How should we refashion the role of schools and health agencies in keeping kids safe, healthy and ready to learn? Universal Access to What? How do we develop environmental health so it connects more closely with communities and uses data and educates more, even as it remains ready for the inevitable legal, regulatory and political wars?

I hope you will continue to listen to and amplify not just the professionally trained voices in public health, but also the clear, knowledgeable and committed voices of local boards of health and those of local citizens. I hope you will continue to do your work as openly and as collaboratively as possible, understanding that bringing people to issues can be as important as bringing issues to them.

Above all, I hope you will continue to avoid saying only the pleasant, the easy or the comfortable parts of the truth. I hope you will continue to choose integrity, openness and good advice over strategy and political expedience.

My time with you has been a gift. Thank you. You know I will continue to help all I can in your continuing efforts toward a safer and healthier Washington.

Sincerely,

Don Sloma, Executive Director